

## **First-ever meeting with deputy ministers "full and frank", president says**

"No, we did not reach a medical version of the Meech Lake Accord, but it was a good meeting." That was about all the CMA president, Dr. John O'Brien-Bell, would say regarding his mid-June meeting with federal and provincial deputy ministers of health at Meech Lake, PQ.

O'Brien-Bell was accompanied by the CMA secretary-general, Dr. Léo-Paul Landry, and the CMA's director of communications and government relations, Doug Geekie. It was the first time such a meeting has been held between the CMA and the ministers. "As they say in diplomatic circles, we had a full and frank discussion, but it would be inappropriate for me to even list the subjects discussed", O'Brien-Bell said when asked about the meeting. He has been actively lobbying for a meeting between provincial and national leaders of the medical profession and provincial and federal health departments to plot the future of the health care system.

## **Anonymous AIDS testing should be rejected, Ottawa MD says**

An Ottawa doctor says the possible introduction of anonymous testing for the human immunodeficiency virus in Ontario is "at best worrisome and possibly dangerous". Dr. Ian Gemmill, associate medical officer of health with the Ottawa-Carleton Health Department, argues that the main rationale for anonymous testing — the elimination of fear about potential disclosure — is "largely unfounded".

"Of the thousands of positive tests already documented in Ontario, there have been only four instances in which the individual's identity has become known", Gemmill reports. "None of these breaches have occurred through the public health system because of familiarity with, and a deep commitment to, confidentiality. They have occurred through physician's offices, friends, and self-disclosure."

Gemmill thinks anonymous testing would pose several potential problems. For instance, if an error was made it would be impossible to notify the person — further spread might occur if people wrongly believed themselves free of the virus. He also says there would be no way to inform sexual partners who may be at risk. "What Ontario needs is not anonymous testing, but education on confidentiality, stricter enforcement of the confidentiality legislation and a ban on the publication of names of infected people."

## **OMA makes big push to promote bicycle helmets**

The Ontario Medical Association (OMA) and the province's transport ministry have launched a campaign to encourage use of bicycle safety helmets. Dr. Carole Guzman, the OMA president, says doctors want to make the public more aware of a helmet's benefits. By promoting them as part of a rider's basic equipment, the OMA hopes the number of bicycle-related head injuries will fall.

A 1984-86 study conducted at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children found that bicycle accidents were responsible for up to 25% of fatalities reported in the trauma unit. As well, a 1985-87 study of coroners' offices revealed that 14% of all deaths resulting from pediatric injuries in Ontario were caused by bicycle accidents. Virtually all bicycle-related deaths resulted from head injuries.

The campaign slogan, "Some never make it 'round the block. . . . Never ride without an approved helmet", is found on posters mailed to physicians. Included with the posters are coupons offering \$5 off the price of helmets at Canadian Tire stores. The campaign follows several years of study by the OMA's Committee on Accidental Injuries.

## **PEI doctors back CMA on tobacco-in-drugstores stand**

Members of the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island (MSPEI) who attended the society's 134th annual meeting at the Mill River Resort June 8-10 unanimously passed a resolution endorsing the CMA's campaign to discourage the sale of tobacco products by pharmacies. Every drugstore on the island sells tobacco, and this fact bothers some members.

The theme of women in medicine was addressed by both the CMA president, Dr. John O'Brien-Bell, and by the retiring MSPEI president, Dr. Dagny Dryer. Dryer, an oncologist, was the society's first woman president. She is succeeded by Dr. David Knickle, a Charlottetown obstetrician.

## **Board OK's creation of committee to represent CMA affiliates**

The CMA Board of Directors has approved creation of a special committee of representatives from the CMA's 36 affiliated societies. The affiliates have been lobbying for more input into policy-making. The committee's chairman is Dr. Jeffrey Nisker of London, Ont., while Dr. John Bennett, the CMA's associate secretary-general, will ensure that support services are provided. Most medical specialty bodies, including the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, as well as other major medical organizations like the Canadian Medical Protective Association and the Federation of Medical Women of Canada, are CMA affiliates.

The committee is meant to provide a forum at which issues common to affiliated societies can be discussed. It is also designed to provide a more direct way for affiliates to comment on CMA policy initiatives and to submit periodic reports and recommendations to the CMA board. It is expected to meet twice a year; the affiliates already send representatives to General Council, the CMA's ultimate governing body.

## **Federal government announces ban on sale of lawn darts**

Ottawa is going to ban the sale of elongated-tip lawn darts, the minister of consumer and corporate affairs announced recently. The decision follows an American ban and pressure from the Canadian Paediatric Society, which has received reports of several injuries caused by the darts. In the US, they are known to have been responsible for several deaths. "While safer models of lawn darts may well be on the market", said the minister, Bernard Valcourt, "I would not like one more summer to pass with the hazards associated with the pointed-tip model still out there."

Meanwhile, his department warns against using existing darts carelessly or around children; the darts are not recommended for use by children. Their sale will be banned under the Hazardous Products Act.

## **Pharmaceutical company offers two drugs free to working poor**

In a pilot project aimed at helping the working poor, Searle Canada Inc. is going to provide \$1 million worth of drugs to low-income Canadians who do not have drug-benefit coverage and do not receive social assistance. Robert Whitehead, the company president, says the program will provide Isoniazid, an antihypertensive agent, and Cytotec, used to treat and prevent certain types of gastric ulcers, free to low-income workers. The company says it will also refund 100% of the cost of the most recent prescription for any Searle product if the prescribing physician says it failed to achieve the desired therapeutic effect.

If the first phase of the program proves successful, Searle says other drugs will be added to it. More information is available by calling 1-800-387-4079 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. EST on weekdays.